

LAGUNA BEACH COASTLINE PILOT

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Downtown businesses dig out

By Cindy Frazier

Businesses in downtown [Laguna Beach](#) were hard hit by the pounding storm that sent waters cascading over the Beach Street flood channel and inundating the low-lying area with silt, mud and debris.

The storm hit during the height of the holiday shopping season. By midday Wednesday, retailers were grimly going about the work of restoring their shops so they could open their doors as soon as the streets were reopened. South Coast Highway and the entire downtown area was fully open by 1 p.m. Thursday, according to City Manager John Pietig.

City officials said that 46 downtown businesses suffered damage.

By midday Wednesday, work crews with shovels and skidloaders had cleaned up much of the mud that covered Broadway and Forest Avenue. Shopkeepers, however, were left with a big mess to contend with.

While some shopkeepers were sweeping water out of their shops, some were tossing out carpeting and ruined merchandise.

Brussels Bistro, an underground nightclub and restaurant on Forest Avenue, was knee-deep in water at one point, according to the cleanup crew.

The newsstand on Forest Avenue was coated with a three-inch layer of drying silt as employees tossed out magazines and newspapers ruined by the waters.

On Ocean Avenue, Katharine Story and her mother, Joanne, were hard at work cleaning up her dress shop. None of the merchandise was affected by the two- to four inches of mud that entered.

"We were lucky because we have cement floors and no carpet," Katharine said. "We'll be open for business tomorrow."

Down the street at the Sirous & Sons Rug Gallery, wooden floors appeared soaked and the piles of Persian rugs were water-logged.

At John's Jewelry on Forest Avenue, all the carpeting had been ripped out because of water damage. Chico's dress shop was closed and a worker was cleaning up the floors.

The downtown banks were off-limits to customers as workers cleared parking lots of silt and debris.

Some shops and businesses were still barricaded with flood gates or sandbags. Those with steel flood gates fared best in the deluge.

At Santa's Hut, where children normally line up to tell their Christmas gift wishes to the jolly elf, a pile of muddy sand was growing as skiploaders pushed it onto the pile.

Tax relief offered

The Board of Equalization is providing extensions for filing, audits, billing notices, assessments and relief from subsequent penalties for individuals and businesses impacted by rainstorms, Board of Equalization Member Michelle Steel announced.

Steele said emergency relief for taxpayers and fee payers may include extensions for filing returns or to make payments, relief of interest and penalties, and expediting copies of BOE tax records. Any taxpayer or fee payer who, as a result of the rainstorms, cannot meet tax filing and payment deadlines may apply. For more information, visit <http://www.boe.ca.gov>.